

Human Rights Project
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Rights at Home

The ISIM commenced the project 'Rights at Home: An Approach to the Internalization of Human Rights in Family Relations in Islamic Communities' on 1 October 2001. This project seeks to promote respect for human rights within the family and community in different parts of the Muslim world, particularly with respect to the rights of women and children.

Focusing on selected communities within the Islamic world, 'Rights at Home' intends to supplement current legalistic approaches to human rights with a broader analysis and action at the societal level in order to mediate the dichotomy between the public and private spheres, and between modernized and traditional segments of society, in favour of greater respect of human rights within an Islamic framework.

This approach is premised on the view that the private domain of the family in its communal context is a primary location for the internalization of human rights norms as a value system, yet is simultaneously a site for their endemic violation. As this intimate sphere is inaccessible to readily available methods for the implementation of rights by the state and other external actors, this project proposes to supplement – not replace – this 'state-centric approach' by informing and supporting *internal*, community-level initiatives for social change through local actors who combine a commitment to human rights with the ability to effectively

advocate the underlying values of these rights within their own communities. These actors, referred to as 'advocates of social change', are the primary target group of the project.

The ultimate beneficiaries of 'Rights at Home' are women and children in Islamic societies, whose rights will be addressed under two main themes: the socialization of children at home and the personal autonomy of women. The socialization of children comprises the values and norms instilled and legitimized by the ways children are perceived and treated by all other members of the family and community. The personal autonomy of women is understood here to mean their ability to achieve substantive social mobility by effectively pursuing possibilities of education, employment, and general participation in the public affairs of their communities.

More concretely, the project aims at building capacity for women to demand their rights, especially in the field of economic, social, and cultural rights. This requires critically addressing questions of Islamic family law, which continues to be applied by Islamic communities throughout the world even where it is not formally enforced by the state, as well as customary practices and domestic power relations as the necessary basis to deal with actual human rights issues such as gender equality, domestic violence,

restriction of mobility, denial of access to work and political participation.

Children's rights are also closely related to the domestic sphere covered by family law – whether based on state, Islamic, or customary norms – which regulates matters of guardianship, adoption, legitimacy, parenthood, and custody. At the same time, children's rights are also directly related to the social and economic development of the community at large. This induces taking up themes such as child labour and other forms of abuse, and how to socialize boys and girls into equal and fair gender relations.

As it is clear that this approach has to overcome some serious theoretical and practical difficulties, this project will devote a sufficient initial period to identifying significant advocates of social change in selected communities, and finding out about their communal power bases and networks in order to fully appreciate their contextual circumstances. To this purpose, the project will convene three Sounding Board Meetings in the selected regions – Islamic Africa, the Arab world (North Africa and West Asia) and South and Southeast Asia – and conduct local field research, in addition to developing relevant networks of scholars, research institutes, NGOs, human rights activists, and resource persons.

Subsequently, the project will conduct interactive workshops to provide the identi-

fied actors with theological, jurisprudential, and other social science resources for developing their own capacity to raise issues important for their respective communities on the basis of the insights gained. These sessions will offer a platform for a combined intellectual-pragmatic dialogue related to the project's themes and approach in which the candidates also have the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences and specific local constraints or commonalities. Furthermore, the project will provide continued support for these human rights advocates in implementing their own plans for cultural transformation upon return to their countries. In addition, workable models will be developed for usage in wider settings, such as training manuals (in written, audio and visual formats), advocacy guidebooks, and media packages. In this way, the need to limit initial implementation of the project's methodology to certain local communities will be compensated for by the subsequent wider use of these materials and skills in other Islamic communities around the world.

The Project Team consists of Abdullahi A. An-Na'im (Emory University School of Law, USA, and Visiting Professor ISIM), Nasr Abu Zaid (ISIM/Leiden University) and Laila al-Zwaini (ISIM). The faculty of the ISIM serves as academic resource persons for the project as a whole. The duration of the project is three years.